

Media Contact: Nicole Stricker, 208-526-5955

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INL achieves DOE's highest safety verification as injury and illness performance is nationally recognized

The U.S. Department of Energy recently awarded Idaho National Laboratory the highest level of verification for its safety systems and practices, following a rigorous two-week evaluation by a national team of safety experts. Known as Integrated Safety Management System (ISMS) Phase II, the verification is part of a long-standing DOE initiative to strengthen safety across its laboratory system nationwide.

The ISMS verification is a two-phase process that started when Battelle Energy Alliance began managing the lab in 2005. During Phase I, DOE officials analyzed the contractor's integrated safety plan and approved it in September 2006.

"Successful completion of Phase II verification confirms that INL has made significant progress in implementing work control processes that help assure all mission work will be completed safely," said Bob Stallman, senior operations and safety officer with the DOE Idaho Operations Office.

"This is the kind of noteworthy achievement that does not come easily, nor does it happen overnight," said John Grossenbacher, laboratory director. He emphasized that doing work safely is crucial to INL's efforts to expand its work scope and customer base.

Grossenbacher has long emphasized to employees that INL must be a model of safe operations if it wants to lead the world in nuclear research and development. At the conclusion of Fiscal Year 2007 - which ran from Oct. 1, 2006, through Sept. 30, 2007 - the rate of cases that resulted in missed or restricted days due to injuries at INL was 0.29 per 200,000 work hours, which translates to 10 cases. The rate was twice that (0.58) in FY06 and even higher (0.70) in 2005, the first year BEA ran the laboratory.

By comparison, the case rate in general industry was 2.3 in 2006 (the most current data available) according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and 0.7 for the entire DOE complex in Fiscal Year 2006.

In recognition of its outstanding safety performance, INL was recently awarded the Voluntary Protection Program Star of Excellence Award at DOE's national VPP conference. The award recognizes that INL's injury and illness rates are 75 percent lower than the Bureau of Labor Statistics national average for companies performing similar work.

The ISMS Phase II verification team - including representatives from DOE's Office of Nuclear Energy, Environmental Management's Consolidated Business Center and Idaho Operations Office - analyzed more than 700 documents, interviewed more than 300 employees, observed more than 150 work activities and attended 19 presentations to evaluate whether employees and managers were following safety procedures.

"It's important to INL that the community have trust and confidence in our ability to perform work safely and this independent verification helps grow that trust and confidence," said Oren Hester, INL's deputy director for Environment, Safety and Health. Hester emphasizes that it is a continuous improvement process and that safety enhancements will not stop here.

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